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Promotion and protection of all human rights, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, including the right to development

Written statement* submitted by the Asian Legal Resource Centre, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[25 May 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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INDONESIA: Extreme poverty in Asmat regency has caused measles and malnutrition

The Asian Legal Resource Centre (ALRC) wishes to inform the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) about the extreme poverty and health crisis faced by Asmat regency in Papua, Indonesia. Approximately 70 Papuan children died from measles and malnutrition in 2018. Extreme poverty and a lack of public infrastructure in the province, particularly in Asmat regency, has caused serious health problems and malnutrition, direly affecting children. The Indonesian government has failed in protecting its citizens' right to health and life.

Papua has now been a part of the Republic of Indonesia for 55 years (1963 - 2018), as confirmed by the United Nations General Assembly Resolution No. 2504, 21 November 1969. Despite all this time, today Papua and West Papua provinces remain Indonesia's poorest provinces. According to the Central Statistics Agency (*BPS*), as of 2016, Papua and West Papua provinces had the highest number of poor people in Indonesia: Papua province with 28.4% and West Papua province with 24.88%. Then followed by East Nusa Tenggara province (NTT) with 22.01%, Moluccas province with 19.26%, Gorontalo province with 17.63%, Bengkulu province with 17.03%, and Aceh province with 16.43%.

After President Joko Widodo's inauguration in October 2014, he declared that his government will focus on the development of public infrastructure such as roads, highways, railways. Although one of the priority infrastructure developments is in Papua and West Papua provinces, extreme poverty and isolated areas remain a serious problem, and has brought negative impact to indigenous Papuans who live in the district.

In Asmat regency, the measles and malnutrition epidemic has affected approximately 11 districts: Swator, Aswi, Akat, Fayit, Pulau Tiga, Kolf Branza, Jetsy, Pantai Kasuari, Safan, Unirsarau, and Siret. Being the most remote areas of Asmat regency, victims in these districts faced serious difficulties in obtaining access to medical facilities, resulting in the death of 70 children.

In Agats, the capital regency of Asmat, the Agats General Hospital (RSUD) did not have enough facility or capacity to tackle all the patients infected of measles and malnutrition. In fact, the Agats hospital is a category D hospital, which means it needs empowering. Moreover, the lack of space in the hospital meant that many patients were treated in the nearest church buildings.

This epidemic clearly shows how Papua has been left behind in terms of eradication of extreme poverty, development of health facilities and development of public infrastructure. In other provinces, such as Jakarta, Central and West Java or other islands such as Sumatera and Bali, there are numerous public and private hospitals of category B and A, easy to access. Papua mostly has public hospitals of type D, especially in remote areas. There is a category A hospital in Jayapura city, the capital of Papua, but it is quite far from Agats, and to reach Jayapura from Agats is difficult due to the lack of infrastructure.

The epidemic also revealed how neither the central government of Indonesia in Jakarta, nor the local government in Papua province and Asmat regency, have been able to develop an early warning system to prevent measles and malnutrition. The government, in particular President Joko Widodo, must change the approach in dealing with the problem. While the President's presence in Asmat would have been good in empowering the local government to tackle the problem, his presence alone is not enough. It is also necessary to develop appropriate plans and programs in addressing poverty and health issues, which can run without the President's presence. This is linked to empowering the local government, which is the institution representing the State to ensure the fulfilment and protection of citizens' rights without exception and undue delay.

Further, as a state party to the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Indonesia is obligated to ensure its citizens' rights to be free from hunger; to address the prevention, treatment and control of epidemic, endemic, occupational and other diseases; and to create conditions that would assure medical attention to all. Similarly, national laws such as Law No. 36 of 2009 guarantee the right to equal health access for all citizens. The case of measles and malnutrition, which occurred in Asmat regency, is a clear example that the government of Indonesia has failed to

eradicate extreme poverty; the government program on the massive infrastructure development has yet significantly contribute for the better life of indigenous Papuans, in particular who live in remote area such as Asmat regency.

Considering above-mentioned condition of extreme poverty in Asmat regency Papua province, we respectfully request the Human Rights Council urge the Government to:

1. Boost development of health access in Papua. The assistance from the central government should not merely be limited to eradicating disease in Asmat regency, but should ensure that remote areas in Papua receive priority in development of health access, facilities and infrastructure.
2. Ensure the government branches in particular the Minister of Health and the Coordinator Minister of Welfare should take initiatives to monitor, evaluate and ensure the implementation of such policies. Local government should also open access for NGOs and media to monitor the recovery and development in remote areas.
3. Ensure that all children, including pregnant mothers in Papua, particularly in Asmat regency, are given enough nutrition, food, and vaccines to prevent disease.
4. Officially invite and cooperate with the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights.